

International

40 pc of world's people will experience chronic water shortage by 2025

WASHINGTON, Sept 15: Dwindling water supplies are adding to tension in many regions of the world and the effect will increase in coming years, a Washington based environmental group said on Saturday, reports Reuter.

By 2025, just a generation away 40 per cent of the world's people will be living in countries experiencing chronic water shortages or water stress, the Worldwatch Institute said in a report.

"Political leaders are vastly underestimating the influence of water scarcity on food production, natural systems and regional peace and stability," author Sandra Postel said.

She said tensions over water persist in the major river basins of the Middle East — the Jordan, the Nile and the Tigris-Euphrates — as well as the Ganges in South Asia and the Aral sea basin.

Treaty recognized by all the parties that allocates the basin's waters among them," the report, entitled "dividing the waters," said.

It said at least 214 rivers flow through two or more countries, but no enforceable law governs the allocation of international fresh water.

In the Middle East, Israel recognised Palestinian rights to West Bank water for the first time in an agreement signed in September 1995, the report said.

But on a per capita basis Israeli settlers in the West Bank use about four times more water than their Palestinian neighbours and pay about a third as much per cubic meter.

"Until such inequities are addressed and the larger issue of the permanent allocation of water rights is resolved, tensions will persist," the institute said.

GCC states support Kuwait's move to defend itself Iraq has right to shoot jets policing no-fly zone: Russia

BAGHDAD, Sept 15: Russia does not recognise US and allied no-fly zones in Iraq's north and south and Baghdad has the right to shoot at warplanes entering the zones off-limits to Iraqi aircraft, a senior Russian diplomat in Baghdad said today, reports Reuter.

"We do not recognise either of the no-fly zones, in the north and south... this country has the right to protect itself. When they (Iraqis) have warplanes of another country flying over their airspace they have the right to shoot," Vladimir Titorenko, deputy head of the Russian mission in Baghdad, told Reuters in an interview.

Iraq said on Friday that for the time being it would halt firing anti-aircraft missiles at Western warplanes policing the no-fly zones, in a bid to defuse the latest military showdown with Washington.

The United States is continuing with its military build-up in the region for expected further military strikes on Iraq, Titorenko said. Moscow viewed the planned dispatch of more US troops to the region as an attempt by Washington to escalate tension.

He said Russian diplomats in Iraq were in constant contact with Moscow and Iraqi leaders. Iraqi leaders on Friday said they would stop firing at the intruding warplanes and Titorenko, whose country helped broker the pledge, said he was certain Baghdad would honour the commitment.

Earlier AFP says, Gulf Arab states fully support Kuwait's moves to defend itself and the Emir is ready to stand up to any Iraq threat, Defence Minister Ahmad al-Hamad al-Sabah said today.

the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), at its head Saudi Arabia, are with us heart and soul," Sheikh Ahmad said in newspaper.

They understand all the measures which we have carried out, and are supporting us in all steps which we have undertaken related to the government or armed forces," the minister said.

He said the government was in constant touch with the five other states of the GCC — Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

"Until this moment I have not been informed of any Iraqi military build-up on our border... but we are ready for any circumstance and we are watching the situation," the minister said.

He said that US and Kuwaiti forces would take part in more

joint exercises at the end of the month that were already planned before the rise in tension in the region.

But the Pentagon said on Saturday that while thousands of army troops had been given orders to prepare for deployment in Kuwait, they may not actually be deployed.

It had earlier said 5,000 troops would be sent this weekend to Kuwait, which Iraq occupied from August 1990 to February 1991 until its ouster by a US-led military coalition in the Gulf War.

AP adds from Madrid: Citing a lack of respect in making the request, Spain denied the United States permission to land a group of fighter planes on Spanish soil before continuing on to Kuwait, a government official said Saturday.

Afghan jets launch air strike on Jalalabad

JALALABAD, Afghanistan, Sept 15: Government jets Sunday launched an air strike on the eastern Afghan city of Jalalabad, dropping bombs near a cluster of strategic government buildings, witnesses and United Nations officials said, reports AP.

At least one of the jets, screaming down on the city in a nose dive, dropped its load near Jalalabad's historic Winter Palace, where hundreds of rebel troops have been camped out since capturing the city on Wednesday.

Initial reports indicated five people were killed in the bombing run and at least three buildings were completely destroyed.

One bomb landed near one of the city's only functioning hotels, used by the staff of many international aid agencies.

"I just ran for cover," said Col. Leslie Sintim-Edey, a military advisor with the United Nations Special Mission for Afghanistan. "I dived for cover between the beds."

One bomb landed outside the

hotel, not far from Sintim-Edey's room. The walls were pocked-marked with shrapnel. Shards of glass from the windows littered the ground.

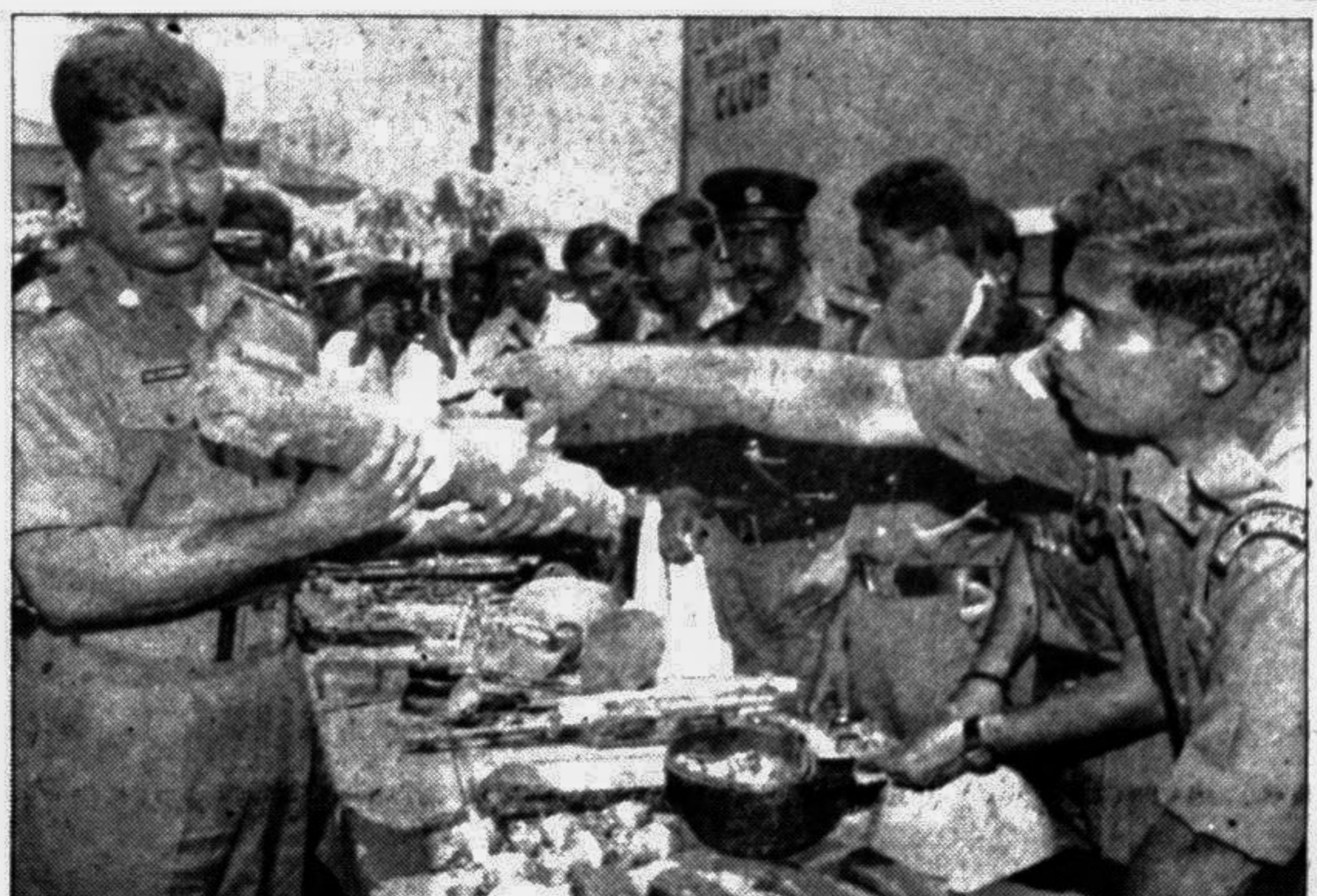
At least four bombs hit Jalalabad near the Spinaghah hotel, which is situated amid a row of important government buildings now held by Taliban militia rebels.

"I don't know what they wanted to hit, but they could have hit anything, everything is in this area," said Mohammed Ajmal, a desk clerk at the hotel.

Bombs landed close to the blue-domed Winter Palace, a one-time popular residence with exiled Afghan King Zahir Shah. It was unclear if the palace was damaged.

Rebel forces have used the palace and the Governor's Mansion as their headquarters since marching into Jalalabad.

Hundreds of young Taliban fighters, clad in their trademark black turbans and carrying assault rifles, were milling about Sunday morning on the palace's front lawn.



An army trooper points to a rocket-propelled grenade launcher found at a Tamil Tiger guerrilla safe house during a press display in the Sri Lankan capital on September 3. The haul was discovered during an operation against rebel infiltrators in the capital.

Turkish troops kill 61 PKK rebels

ANKARA, Sept 15: Sixty-one rebels of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) were killed Saturday in separate military operations in south-eastern Turkey, according to a statement issued by the governor's office of the emergency rule region, reports Xinhua.

The statement said that Turkish security forces wiped out 33 PKK rebels in Kemerpete area in Catak town of Van province, 22 PKK rebels in Sirkap province and six in the provinces of Hakkari and Mardin.

Seven soldiers of the Turkish security forces also died in the clashes with the PKK in the region, said the statement.

It added that the security forces shot dead more than 200 PKK rebels in their military operations for past 15 days in southeastern Turkey.

The statement said that the Turkish government troops are continuing their military operations against the PKK in this region.

Attack against Israel PA arrests 4 Jihad men in WB

JERUSALEM, Sept 15: Palestinian security forces arrested members of a militant Islamic group who were planning to carry out attacks against Israel during the Jewish New Year, a senior Palestinian security official said Saturday, reports AP.

Yasser Arafat's security forces arrested four members of the militant Islamic Jihad organisation 10 days ago in the West Bank city of Bethlehem, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity. One suspect was shot by police in the leg as he tried to escape arrest.

We have foiled an attempt by a group of Islamic Jihad activists operating in the Bethlehem area to carry out attacks during the Jewish New Year," the official said.

Lankan Army launches recruitment drive

COLOMBO, Sept 15: The Sri Lankan army has launched a major recruitment drive following the recent upsurge in the war with separatist Tamil Tiger rebels, reports Reuter.

"Our resources have weakened considerably and we want to recruit tens of thousands of soldiers," a military spokesman said today.

He said more than 7,000 local government officials were involved in the nationwide programme and the military was running daily recruitment advertisements in local newspapers.

"We are now consolidating military positions in front areas and we will have to wait until we have enough resources before staging a major offensive," a senior military official told Reuters.

The military balance has remained largely unchanged since the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) handed the military its worst setback in the 13-year war in July when they overran a strategic army base.

The army launched an offensive soon after the LTTE wiped out the northeastern Mullaitivu camp killing or capturing almost its entire garrison of 1,400 men.

Meanwhile, navy boats fought a close-range battle with a flotilla of Tamil rebel craft off Sri Lanka's northeastern coast, leaving at least two sailors killed and five wounded, officials said today.

The battle erupted when the navy spotted four fiberglass boats of Trincomalee.

Perry in Kuwait to discuss Gulf situation

KUWAIT, Sept 15: US Defence Secretary William Perry arrived in Kuwait today after a brief visit to neighbouring Saudi Arabia to discuss the situation in the Gulf region, state-owned Kuwait News Agency said, reports Reuter.

The agency said Perry, greeted on arrival by Kuwaiti Defence Minister Sheikh Ahmad Hamoud al-Jaber al-Sabah, would also visit other Gulf Arab states and Turkey on a tour aimed at shoring up the Anti-Iraq Gulf War Coalition that ended Baghdad's 1990-91 occupation of Kuwait.

"Perry arrived in the state of Kuwait today on a tour of the region that aims to discuss the current situation in the Arabian Gulf Region," the agency said.

CIA spent \$100m for bid to oust Saddam Hussein

WASHINGTON, Sept 15: The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) spent about 100 million dollars since 1991 to implement a classified 1991 presidential order to oust Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, The Washington Post reported in Sunday editions, says Reuter.

The paper quoted administration, congressional and disident Iraqi sources as saying that despite the money spent on the anti-Saddam campaign, the US spy agency had very little to show for its effort.

The Post said the CIA had funded disident Kurds and Iraqis, enabling them to buy light arms and ammunition, communications gear, publishing materials, broadcasting equipment, cars and trucks, food and medicine.

The CIA's operation in northern Iraq fell apart last month when Massoud Barazani, a Kurdish rebel leader, requested Saddam's military assistance to oust a rival Kurdish group from the region.

BRIEFLY

Voting begins in Bekaa Valley: Lebanese in the Eastern Bekaa Valley vote yesterday in the final round of elections that have already returned an overwhelming majority of pro-Syrian deputies to parliament, Reuter reports from Beirut.

Polling stations open at 7:00 am (0400 GMT) and close at 5:00 PM (1400 GMT). The Bekaa's 410,000 voters will elect 23 deputies to the 128-member parliament in the fifth round of regional voting that began on August 18. Results are expected on today or Tuesday.

UNSC lifts arms ban on Rwanda: The UN Security Council has lifted the arms embargo against the Rwandan government but has kept it in place against non-governmental forces in the central African country, officials said Saturday, AFP reports from United Nations.

The restrictions "on the sale or supply of arms and related material to the government of Rwanda were terminated effective September 11," according to a UN statement issued Saturday.

Afghan pilot defects to Taliban: An Afghan government pilot flying a military helicopter defected yesterday landing the aircraft in the Taliban-held eastern city of Jalalabad, a Taliban spokesman said, AFP reports from Quetta.

Jalalabad, capital of Nangarhar province, was taken over by the Taliban military on September 11.

3 Mexican anti-drug agents killed: Three anti-drug agents, including a top justice official from the Mexican border, state of Baja California, were gunned down on Saturday as they left Mexico City airport, authorities said, Reuter reports from Mexico City.

The Attorney General's office said in a statement that unknown gunmen shot dead Ernesto Ibarra Santes, a senior commander of the Federal Judicial Police in the northern city of Tijuana, and two of his agents as they travelled in an airport taxi. The taxi driver was also killed.

IRA's top leaders plan to meet: The IRA's leaders plan to meet for the first time in 10 years in a move that could herald an end to the guerrilla group's violent 27-year campaign to oust Britain from northern Ireland, according to newspapers reports, Reuter reports from London.

General Sunday newspapers said the IRA's shadowy general assembly (GAC) would meet as early as next month — 10 years after its last gathering — to decide policy for the years ahead.

Afghan troops being treated in India: Afghan government soldiers wounded in battles are being treated in private hospitals in the Indian capital, a newspaper reported yesterday, AFP reports from New Delhi.

The Hindustan Times said the government of President Bhabanur Rahman was sending the troops to New Delhi because Kabul's hospitals "have been badly damaged in rocket attacks and bombings."



Moulvi Mohammad Mouzammam Ahmed (R) sits at his office at the 17th-century Fatehpuri Mosque in New Delhi on Saturday with a group of Hindu and Muslim patients. Ahmed, a cleric, says the mosque attracts hundreds of Hindus because of its curative power.

Off the Record



Tara Dawn Holland (R), Miss Kansas, is crowned Miss America 1997, by Shawntel Smith, Miss America 1996, at the end of the Miss America Pageant on Sunday, in Atlantic City, NJ, USA.

Too costly Jackson

BUCHAREST, Romania: Faithful Romanian fans flocked to Michael Jackson on Saturday, even if they couldn't afford to see him perform, reports AP.

"I love Michael, but I have no money for the concert," said Florin Raducanu, 19, one of about 150 fans gathered outside Jackson's hotel.

Tickets for the show cost the equivalent of 18 dollars, a relatively large sum in the formerly communist country where the average monthly salary is about 100 dollars.

On Friday, Jackson visited a state orphanage and watched a children's show staged for him in the giant marble-walled palace built for late dictator Nicolae Ceausescu.

Dozens of fans stampeded after he told them, "I love you all." "I wish all the world was here to see this. Instead of sending our brothers to the killing fields," Jackson said. "This is our future — children. I love you all so much."

Screaming children rushed toward Jackson as he was ushered out by bodyguards. On the palace steps, hysterical fans dashed across the lawn to get a glimpse, in the dying light, of Jackson, who broke into a jog to flee.

Shields tackles her challenge well

NEW YORK: Brooke Shields, whose new television sitcom "Suddenly Susan" begins this fall, tackled her toughest challenge when she decided to fire her manager-mother, reports AP.

Shields still talks often with Teri Shields, but says ending their business relationship last year was "the hardest thing" she's ever done.

"Something didn't feel right," Shields says in the October 3 Rolling Stone. "I had hopes and dreams, and I wasn't doing anything to go toward them. ... The focus was on creating a persona rather than a talent."

Now 31, Shields played a prostitute at age 11 in Louis Malle's "Pretty Baby." She went on to cause a brief scandal with threecy ads for Calvin Klein jeans, then had a string of mostly unsuccessful film roles.

But unlike other child stars, Shields appears to have stayed on the right track. She's a Princeton graduate, engaged to pro tennis star Andre Agassi — and has her new TV show.

"It's thrilling but a bit terrifying," she said.

I won't step down as party president: Rao

NEW DELHI, Sept 15: Former Indian prime minister PV Narasimha Rao, facing increasing dissent within his Congress Party, said he will not step down as party president, The Times of India reported today, says Reuter.

"I am not going to step down. Activities of my detractors cannot do any harm to me," The Times quoted Rao as saying at a meeting of leaders of the youth wing of his party on Saturday.

Dissenting leaders, who now include his once-close aides, are seeking to oust Rao as party chief following a series of scandals which have shaken the party this year. Rao is under scrutiny for his role in three scandals.

The Congress Party, which has ruled India for all but four years since independence from Britain in 1947, suffered its

worst-ever electoral humiliation this year, party dissidents say Rao must accept responsibility for the defeat. They are power hungry but have no following," The Times of India quoted Rao saying of leaders who are seeking his ouster. The party, bowing to dissident demands for introspection and change, has agreed to hold later this year a meeting of the All India Congress Committee, the powerful party plenary that elects its senior leadership. Rao is contesting a court summons in a case of fraud in which an expatriate businessman alleges he paid a Rao acquaintance 100,000 dollars in 1983, in a failed attempt to win a state contract. Rao has also been accused by police of having a role in a vote-buying scandal to survive a no-confidence vote in parliament

Clinton faces contradictory pressures in confronting Iraq

WASHINGTON, Sept 15: Contradictory pressures face US President Bill Clinton as he confronts Iraq. Political critics demand quick and violent attacks on Saddam Hussein, while voices from abroad plead for patience and diplomacy, reports AP.

Even as America lined up firepower and troops in the Gulf region this weekend, the rhetoric from Washington softened. Saddam also backed off from his firing of missiles at American planes that either were not there or could not be hit.

Clinton, in his weekly radio address Saturday, said he ordered enough force into the Gulf to protect American interests and repeated none of the Pentagon threats of strong action.

Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon called Iraq's decision to stop firing "a wise move" that could defuse tension. Other

administration officials were less impressed, but the gentler words from Washington no longer matched the army of fighter bombers, ships and training troops gathering in the Gulf.

Even the US military moves, a far cry from the 1991 Gulf War force, signalled little real concern that Saddam would actually invade another country as he did with his march into Kuwait.

The question was why the United States was willing to risk to punish the Iraqi dictator for actions in his own country?

The scaled-down rhetoric from both sides, however, does not mean any diplomatic channel has opened or is likely to open. An official Iraqi newspaper called for talks, but US officials want to see changes in Iraq before considering diplomatic contact.

Iraq's new stance does mean that Clinton has the next move.

He has sent Defence Secretary William Perry for talks with allies in the region. Officials said there will be no attack while Perry is in the area.

If Iraq aims no more weaponry at US, British or French planes as promised, then the longer Clinton waits to strike, the more difficult it will be to justify it to allies, particularly friendly Arab countries.

"If the United States goes ahead and attacks anyway, it sort of makes us look like a laughing stock in the eyes of a lot of people in the region," said Ahmed Hashim, military affairs analyst at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies. "We'd be perceived as very trigger happy."

On the other hand, to back down, Hashim said, "may earn some kudos with middle Eastern communities, but how does it play at home?"

If the Democratic president pulls back now, after making

threats and building up forces in the region, he'll bolster Republican charges of timidity and indecisiveness in the countdown to the November 5 election.

The actual impact on domestic politics, however, is lessened by the fact that Clinton is ahead in the polls. No Clinton adviser is likely to reveal advice that the president needed to tweak Saddam before he could beat Bob Dole.

Whether a political game or a mini-war, the first round in the latest Gulf showdown resulted in a draw, at best, largely because the contestants were engaged on different fields.

Saddam clearly won in the north, while Clinton declared victory in the south.

The second round, if America attacks Iraqi forces with the "disproportionate" response promised by Perry, will probably have a similarly mixed re-

sult. With the Gulf War coalition in disarray and Republicans stepping up criticism, it would be difficult for Clinton to gain both at home and abroad.

Saddam needs only to survive and remain in power in win, and neither his demise nor his departure are part of any conceivable US attack plan with currently deployed forces.

If America can't kill Saddam, it has to hurt him, say proponents of a swashbuckling response to Iraq.

Up until now, the administration has been too cautious in its response, and with Saddam, it's better to over-respond than under-respond," said Jim Phillips of the Heritage Foundation, whose analyses parallel criticism from Republicans.

Phillips suggested several targets that might hurt Saddam or drive a wedge between him and his military and people: His command and control

posts, his Republican Guard, and civilian power plants. "Put them in the dark for a new hours, just so they realise that his provocations do have a consequence," Phillips said.

But such escalation is not recommended by US friends or foes abroad, other than Kuwait.

"There are many ways of finding a political or diplomatic solution without having to talk directly to Saddam," said Khalil Jashan, president of the National Association of Arab Americans. These countries, including US allies, that are dealing with Iraq and could provide a go-between, he said.

"I haven't seen or heard anything creative indicating a new approach," Jashan said Friday, after a week of lobbying for a less reactive policy at the State Department. "It seems to me that Saddam is manipulating the situation in this pre-election period. We are basically dancing to his tune."

Polls in Bosnia Vote counting begins

SARAJEVO, Sept 15: Counting of the millions of ballots cast in Bosnia's general elections began early today, the international agency supervising the history polls said, reports AP.

Ballots from the 4,400 polling stations were being transferred to the 144 counting stations by troops of the NATO-led Force Implementation Force (IFOR).

Counting was due to have started at 7:00 a.m. (0500 GMT) this morning though some could be delayed. Jeff Fischer, a senior official with the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) said.

One of the last polling stations to close was in the Serb-held town of Banja Luka where in the early hours of this morning, some 200 voters were still queuing to cast their ballots, Fischer said.

First results from the landmark elections, held to elect new-style government machinery for post-war Bosnia, were due Monday at the earliest the official said.

"I am not sure how long it's going to take. We will set an objective of tomorrow (Monday) but I cannot guarantee that," he said.

Reuter adds the turnout in Bosnia's first post-war elections was between 60 and 70 per cent according to preliminary figures, the head of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) also told a news conference the polls were almost entirely free of abuse.

"That is a very high turnout well beyond what any of us imagined when we began this procedure," Frowick told reporters.